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Letter dated 19 February 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Cyprus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government and further to my previous letters, the latest dated 5 October 1998 (A/53/460-S/1998/917) I have the honour to bring to your attention the following additional documented information regarding the continuous and systematic plundering of the religious, historical and cultural identity of the Turkish-occupied part of Cyprus.

Consistently and methodically Turkey continues its unabated policy of altering the demographic character of occupied Cyprus through destruction, looting and pillaging of its copious archaeological and religious treasures, which form an integral part of the rich patrimony of the world.

More specifically,

- The new Church of the Holy Virgin Chryseleousa, Kato Kopia, has been converted into a mosque.

- The old Church of the Holy Virgin Chryseleousa, Kato Kopia, has been abandoned, looted and even stripped of its wall painted icons.

- The Church of the Archangel Michael, Rizokarpaso, has been abandoned and left to the mercy of looters.

- The Church of Saint Afxentiou, Komi Kebir, has been abandoned, looted of all its religious artifacts and stripped of all its wall painted icons.

The devastation of the cultural and religious heritage of occupied Cyprus is immense and well documented. As far back as 1982, in a series of articles in the Turkish weekly magazine Olay (26 April-12 May), Mehmet Yasin, a Turkish Cypriot journalist wrote the following: "Cyprus is being estranged from itself: the historic, environmental, communal, cultural structure is being spoiled." He continued and stated how this spoilage was taking place when he wrote "the vacant, unattended archaeological masterpieces are being pillaged".

Furthermore, in an essay entitled "Cyprus: The Loss of a Cultural Heritage" published by the University of Minnesota (Modern Greek Studies Yearbook, vol. 2, 1986), Michael Jansen, a journalist and Middle East analyst, writes: "though there has been continuing looting and export of antiquities and works of art, the major responsibility of what has taken place ... must be borne by the Turkish Cypriot side". Moreover, Michael Jansen states that the administration has been motivated to "Turkify the area [of Cyprus] under occupation. And to do this there has been an effort to remove Hellenic and Christian influences, and, in particular, vandalism of church properties".

As recently as 16 to 29 November 1998, writing in the prestigious magazine Art and Auction, Michael Jansen writes about "a great tidal wave of Cypriot art and antiquities that washed upon European shores in the 1970s and 1980s: in all, looters and smugglers carried off an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 icons, dozens of frescoes and mosaics, thousands of gold and silver candlesticks and chalices, wooden carvings and crosses and tens of thousands of items from archaeological digs". This is yet another example of the magnitude and scope of the crimes being perpetrated against the cultural patrimony of occupied Cyprus.

Even though these documented acts of wanton and systematic destruction are an affront to civilization and are in violation of the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and the Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Cooperation adopted by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, they still continue to this day.

Turkey, as the occupying power responsible, should be made accountable and fully answerable for these illegal acts of destruction. The international community should stop tolerating this unacceptable situation of religious intolerance.

I would be grateful if you would have the present letter conveyed to all human rights mechanisms and circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 62 and 110, and of the Security Council.

Sotos ZACKHEOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative